Converting Class Syllabi to the
Outcomes Based Teaching and Learning Format

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The UGC is encouraging (read mandating) that all Hong Kong universities implement the Outcomes Based Teaching and Learning (OBTL) approach to curriculum design and class teaching as soon as possible. The approach is based on a particular philosophy concerning the educational process, and it involves both rethinking the curriculum as a whole for each academic major and revising the way virtually every individual class we teach is conceived, implemented and, most immediately, presented on paper. The purpose of this document is to describe the OBTL approach as I understand it in order to facilitate the process of transformation to OBTL in the School of Communication. Because the OBTL philosophy of the educational process is somewhat loosely articulated in the documents I have been provided, I have tried to make the philosophy as clear as possible and then present an approach to the transformation process that is manageable in the time available (read September 2008 for HKBU).

THE OBTL PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

The philosophy of education fostered by Outcomes Based Teaching and Learning may be expressed in five guiding principles, as shown in the box below.

- **Learning Outcomes** should be expressed in terms of what students will be able to DO as they master the course content.

- **Teaching Methods** should be aligned with the goals identified in one's *expressed learning outcomes*.

- **Assessment Methods** should be aligned with one's *actual teaching methods* and one's *expressed learning outcomes*.

- **Subjects Taught** should promote a *progression* of cognitive abilities in the students.

- **Curriculum Structures** should provide a relevant frame for teaching all classes in the program using the OBTL approach.

Figure 1. Five Guiding Principles of the OBTL Approach to Course Design

The first principle emphasizes the point that students should be able to use what they are learning for some purpose—that is, to DO something. The principle is not intended to be anti-intellectual or "behaviorist" in its implications. Rather, it is intended to highlight the question: "What do I intend my students be able to do after my teaching that they couldn't do before . . . ?" (Biggs & Tang). The answer could be as "behavioral" as "writing a press release in acceptable English and Chinese." But it could also be as traditionally conceptual as "using appropriate theories to generate possible solutions to a particular communication problem." Thus, as we move to OBTL, we need not fear that we are being driven to teaching raw skills in the absence of higher thinking processes. In fact, we may be able to promote higher level thinking among our students more effectively if we spend some time considering how the conceptual content we teach can actually be *used* for some purpose our students might face in the future. As I will explain below, this means that our learning outcomes should be framed using verbs that emphasize the kind of "doing" we expect our students to be able to accomplish.

The second principle emphasizes the point that subject outcome goals and actual teaching methods should be matched so that the methods we use to teach our classes have a high chance of advancing the learning outcomes we are espousing. Thus, once the learning outcomes have been formed for a particular class, the instructor will need to consider which of the many teaching methods available are most appropriate for implementing those learning outcomes. Lectures will not disappear, because some of the objectives will involve student understanding (and how they are to demonstrate that they have understood), but many of the higher level intellectual goals envisioned are probably not best met through traditional lectures. Projects, problem-base learning, service learning, portfolio development, group work, term papers, oral presentations, and countless other instructional methods can be used to replace or supplement lecture time, depending on the learning outcomes one is trying to foster.

The third principle emphasizes the point that the assessment methods used across the span of a semester's work should also be matched with the learning outcomes being promoted in the class. Assessment in OBTL is intended to be part of the teaching process (not merely the precursor to the grading process), so we must employ assessment methods that can help students understand how far they have come in achieving the learning objectives and where improvement is needed. Moreover, the assessment methods need to be aligned with the expressed outcome statements, so that what we say we are trying to achieve is actually what is being assessed. The most immediate impact of this principle is probably to deemphasize traditional tests and examinations, especially the types of tests and examinations focused on the lowest level intellectual knowledge. Thus, if we formulate an objective such as "students should be able to use appropriate theories to generate possible solutions to a particular communication problem," and then use test questions that merely ask them to name particular theories, or even to explain some key elements of the theory, we will not be promoting that outcome. Knowing which theories are available to address a problem is obviously a small step toward the eventual outcome of being able to use those theories to accomplish something, but testing that level of knowledge cannot stand in as an indicator that the higher level outcome has itself been achieved. The assessment method is simply not powerful enough to evaluate the progress made by the student toward the higher level learning objective.

The fourth principle is in some ways the most challenging for the individual teacher to adapt to, but it is also potentially the most rewarding. It emphasizes the point that there is a hierarchy of learning objectives, such that the lower ones provide the foundations for achieving the higher ones. But it also encourages faculty to consider how we can actually

promote those higher level learning objectives, both individually in our own classes and collectively across the span of the curriculum as a whole. Biggs and Tang present their own model of the hierarchy of learning outcome levels, but they also mention the much more widely known "Bloom" model produced in the 1950s and revised by educationists in the meantime. I personally find an adaptation of Bloom's model of educational objectives much more intuitively serviceable for our purposes and have, accordingly, adapted it for use in this document. However, whichever model is used, the principle remains the same: there are different categories of intellectual achievement that can be arranged hierarchically, and we should be trying to foster the highest levels our students might reasonably be able to achieve in a particular subject and across the curriculum as a whole.

The final principle goes beyond our individual classes and addresses the larger curriculum structure within which any particular class functions as a component. The principle emphasizes that each Major curriculum within the School/University should also be able to state in Outcome Based terms what its broadest curricular goals are. At a curriculum level, it is possible to state general goals and especially the kind of progression of intellectual abilities it expects to foster from the time the student first enters the curriculum to the point where the student is ready to graduate. This task is related to the description of the "student attributes" we want our graduates to manifest when they leave us. This principle also envisions the teaching mission of the University as a whole, which provides the broadest possible frame for our curricula and coursework. Thus, there is something of a cascading hierarchy of specificity, where the University's overarching principle of Whole Person Education (which is being further articulated during this exercise) provides the broadest contextualizing frame, and is implemented in the curriculum structure that includes "majors," "complementary studies," and so forth. The School of Communication has also articulated its goals, though not yet in "outcomes" terms. Then, each of the Departments and Options should have its own more specific curricular outcomes that reflect their content specializations. Ultimately, in this pyramid of cascading specificity, the individual subject as taught by the individual instructor will have its specific Learning Outcomes, which are currently the focus of most of the work on the Outcomes Based Learning enterprise. I try to illustrate this cascading pyramid of Learning Outcomes in the appendix to this overview. The main body of this document focuses on the implementation of the OBTL philosophy at the individual instructor and subject level.

CONSTRUCTING OBTL OUTCOME STATEMENTS

The first step in implementing OBTL in our classes is for each instructor to write a small set of learning outcomes (5 to 6) that identify what the student should be able to *do* as a result of taking the class. That is, each outcome statement should be worded so as to indicate some sort of "doing."

The key to preparing useful outcome statements is choosing an appropriate verb to express the desired learning outcome. Many perfectly normal educational verbs are not particularly serviceable for preparing OBTL outcome statements because they actually provide very little guidance for either the student or the teacher during the rest of the learning process. For example, an outcome expressed as "the student will understand the concepts related to the major theories of persuasion" is actually quite vague. It provides no direction for how the teacher might select learning activities and is equally vague in guiding the selection of educationally relevant assessment activities. More will be said on the formulation of outcome statement after the rest of the overview has been presented.

ALIGNING OUTCOME STATEMENTS, TEACHING METHODS, AND ASSESSMENT METHODS

The second step in implementing OBL in our classes is to identify one or more teaching methods designed to enable students to accomplish the various learning outcomes expressed. That is, one method may be needed to support one type of learning outcome and another method will be better suited for some other learning objective. Of course, some methods will support multiple learning objectives, but usually several different methods will be needed to foster all of the objectives as a whole since different teaching methods will probably tap into and encourage different levels of cognitive learning (described below).

Corresponding to the need to design appropriate teaching methods for accomplishing the learning outcomes is a parallel need to be able to assess the student progress toward accomplishing those outcomes. If one gives a test, requires a term paper, or assigns a group project as part of the teaching design, then these activities should be matched to the outcomes being assessed. That is, there must be a parallel set of assessment methods that focus on evaluating the degree to which the work produced/achieved the desired learning objective. This means that considerable thought will probably need to be given to specifying the criteria one uses to evaluate student work, and also what one is trying to accomplish through one's evaluations. A multiple choice test, for example, might be useful for some objectives, but not for others since such tests are most useful for assessing only the lowest levels of student knowing, as identified by the verb used to express the learning outcome.

The "Constructive Alignment" Concept. Biggs and Tang call the process of matching the teaching methods and evaluative procedures to the learning outcomes they are supposed to help implement *constructive alignment* because one is literally aligning the teaching and assessment tasks with the outcomes one hopes to encourage. In their view, the verb used to express the original learning outcome provides the key to constructing the teaching tasks and evaluative criteria. All should "activate" the same underlying concept and relate to the same kind of "doing."

Below is a blank chart that illustrates the underlying notion of constructive alignment. In the first column one might write the list of learning outcomes one proposes to foster. Then, in the second column the instructor would list the possible teaching methods that could be used to advance each of the desired outcomes. Finally, in the third column the teacher could list the assessment methods that seem to be good candidates for evaluating the student's progress in achieving the various outcomes. To the extent that the teaching and assessment methods correspond, constructive alignment has been achieved. This principle will be illustrated later in the document.

Learning Outcome Desired	Most Appropriate Teaching Method to Use	Best Assessment Method to be Used

Figure 1. A Chart Illustrating the Three Dimension of the Constructive Alignment Process

IMPLEMENTING A *HIERARCHY* OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES

An important key to insuring that one's OBTL efforts do not overemphasize lower levels of knowing and doing at the expense of higher ones (and to insure that one's teaching and assessment methods do not inadvertently undermine the goal of promoting higher levels of student achievement) is to recognize that educational objectives can be arranged in a meaningful hierarchy based on which types of knowledge are being called for. The principle underlying any such hierarchy is the belief that some types of knowledge are more basic (but also simpler to master, demonstrate, and test) than others because they provide the prerequisite foundation for the higher level intellectual accomplishments we seek to foster.

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

The granddaddy of all such hierarchical systems was produced by Benjamin S. Bloom in the 1950s, and now goes by the name "Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives," or simply as "Bloom's Taxonomy," for short. Since its first publication in 1956, Bloom's taxonomy has been pored over and modified to make it more serviceable for various purposes, and I have prepared my own version for our use by adapting it to the goal of facilitating the OBTL transformation process.

Like most adaptors of Bloom's Taxonomy, I identify six hierarchically arranged levels of educational objectives which, from lowest to highest, I call (a) remembering, (b) understanding, (c) applying, (d) analyzing, (e) evaluating, and (f) synthesizing. Other names have been given to these categories by different scholars over the years, but the combination of labels I have chosen seems especially useful for trying to explain what is at stake at each level of educational objective, and why they can be conceived as being *hierarchically* related.

Constructing Outcome Based Learning Objectives
Using the Bloom Taxonomy

Figure 3 lists these six categories and displays them as a progressive hierarchy. Figure 3 also indicates the type of student learning outcome that can be associated with the term/level. In this way, Figure 3 diagrams how the taxonomy is intended to work in OBTL terms.

The lowest and most fundamental level of knowledge/outcome a student can be expected to achieve during a course is *remembering* the information he or she has been exposed to. As shown in Figure 3, this kind of learning outcome might be worded in the abstract as "Students can recall the information they have been exposed to." Applied to a particular subject content, such as the first course in any discipline (for example, the communication discipline), the abstract shell for this level of learning might be worded as, "Students will be able to identify the major concepts related to each of the four tiers of communication study." The concepts could be taught through lectures and close study of a textbook that presents the concepts, and student outcomes could be assessed through simple tests that ask the students to recognize information about the concepts in traditional "objective" formats.

Thus, this is the kind of knowledge we expect to foster through lecturing and studying textbooks, and it is the kind of outcome we expect to be able to assess through simple quizzes using multiple choice, true-false, fill-in-the-blank, and matching formats. This is, of course, also the kind of outcome we have in mind when we talk about students simply "regurgitating" what they have learned. But we have little right to complain that they

regurgitate or parrot what they have heard or read if both our teaching and our assessment methods mostly reinforce this type of learning, whether is it intentional or inadvertent—because we have failed to think about the consequences of our approaches on the learning outcomes actually fostered.
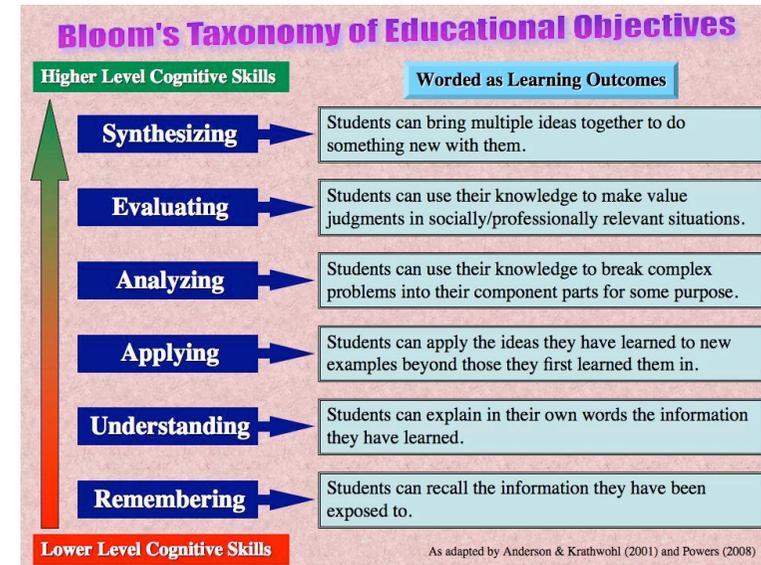

Figure 3. Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, as adapted for OBTL by Powers (2008).

So, if the learning outcome formulated is that students should be able to remember (recall, recognize, identify) certain facts, dates, people, theories, etc., we are emphasizing the lowest level in the hierarchy of educational outcomes. It is, of course, the *sine qua non* without which nothing else is educationally possible. However, while that foundation is being established (both in an individual subject and over a succession of courses in the curriculum as a whole), the next level of learning outcome can also be pursued.

The second level of knowledge in the hierarchy is *understanding*. Understanding occurs when students actually make their own kind of (accurate) sense out of what they have been exposed to. In OBTL terms the "doing" may be framed in terms the student's ability to explain in their own words to someone else what they have learned at the recall level. In terms of teaching methods, this level of learning outcome might be fostered by having students answer questions orally in class about key concepts, principles, theories, etc., in which their own explanations are presented. This is common practice in smaller classes where the teacher can call on individual students to give their explanation of basic concepts and principles in an interactive framework where exchange is possible. In written form, this kind of learning outcome can be encouraged more generally by tests that call for students to briefly explain one or more concepts in short answer format. "Define X concept (remembering level outcome) and explain in your own words (understanding level outcome) what this definition means (implies, etc.) so

that someone else would understand the concept." Similarly, a learning outcome worded as "Students will be able to identify the main features of Y principle/theory (recall level outcome) and explain the meaning/significance of each of those key features (understanding level outcome)" illustrates the distinction between those two levels.

The third level of knowledge in the hierarchy is labeled *applying*. From an OBTL perspective, this term emphasizes the student's ability to use knowledge first learned in one context (or principles that were first understood based on a particular set of examples), to gain insight into some new situation or a different set of conditions than the ones used for introducing, explaining and illustrating those concepts and principles originally. In a sense, this level emphasizes pattern recognition—the student's ability to discover meaningful similarities in somewhat different situations so that they can use the concepts more abstractly to gain insights into those seemingly new circumstances. Students are expected to discover parallels (and, of course, the possibility of meaningful differences) between what may superficially seem to be entirely different things. Accordingly, the learning objective might be worded as "Students will be able to apply the concepts and theories they have learned about X to new situations."

The fourth level of the hierarchy of educational objectives is called *analyzing*. This term is meant to emphasize the goal of having students learn to break complex problems or issues into their component parts for some specific purpose. In OBTL terms, the "doing" would involve giving students a complex problem to fracture into its major contributing elements. Because every discipline, from the most philosophical (such as ethics or aesthetics) to the most traditionally applied (such as engineering or medicine) confronts its practitioners with numerous problems to solve, every discipline should find it relatively easy to form learning objectives related to the analysis outcome. For example, PRA students in the School of Communication might be asked to analyze the image problems of a particular company. They would have to know concepts related to defining an image and how they might be applied to breaking the cause of a particular company's image down into its contributing factors. Assuming that a case study of how to do this type of thing has previously been introduced to teach the students how to do it, the learning depends on the previous three levels of knowledge in that they must know what the analytical concepts are (levels 1 and 2), and also be able to form insights in how they might be applied to this new case. As they make their applications, they would then be actually analyzing the new case based on their three previous levels of learning.

The fifth level of learning outcomes is identified as *evaluating*. This involves the making of value judgments in socially and professionally relevant situations based on both the content knowledge students have about the situation and their assessment of the value terms that can legitimately be applied. Most frequently, perhaps, the value judgments we focus on are of an ethical nature: what is right and wrong. But the value judgments we ask students to make in implementing this level of educational objective need not be limited only to the ethical domain, especially since most choices-among-options in a situation will be based on values other than purely ethical ones: feasibility, workability, practicality, and so forth. Thus, this level of knowledge emphasizes the ability to articulate the relevant values and evaluative standards and to apply them thoughtfully to assessing the particular set of circumstances one is confronted with. Sometimes this will involve prioritizing values—that is, ranking which values are more or less important among otherwise equally positive values in a particular situations. At any rate, we can formulate learning outcomes that relate to making value judgments, develop teaching methods that give students experience in understanding the evaluative dimensions of the subjects they are learning, and can assess their ability to use their evaluative faculties to make

sensible judgments about the kinds of social and professional challenges they will face. Formulated in OBTL terms, we might say that "students will be able to make evaluative judgments based on the most appropriate criteria for the situation." (BTW, Bloom originally placed evaluating at the top of his hierarchy, though most educators working in the Bloom tradition now seem to place it in the fifth position because they feel that the student's evaluative ability provides a prerequisite for what is now seen as the highest level cognitive ability, synthesis.)

The final level of the hierarchy of learning objectives is identified as *synthesizing*. This is the ability to bring multiple aspects of one's knowledge (drawn perhaps from different theories within a domain of knowledge, or even from entirely different domains of knowledge) together into meaningful relationships—so as to be able to do something new with them collectively. It is considered the highest learning objective in the hierarchy because it presumes some educational progress has been made at every level below it and also that one can assemble those pieces together to accomplish a new purpose. Worded as an abstract OBTL outcome, this level specifies that "students will be able to bring multiple ideas (concepts, principles, theories, etc.) together to formulate new approaches to a subject-relevant problem." This is, of course, not the kind of learning outcome that can be fostered through traditional lecture methods or evaluated through simple objective tests. But it is the kind of learning outcome that universities can be expected to promote and which specific disciplines require all the time of their practitioners. And, it is certainly an outcome that some year 1 classes, and all year 2 and year 3 subjects should aspire to foster among their key learning objectives.

Aligning Teaching Methods with One's Outcome Statements Using the Bloom Taxonomy

It is assumed that most subjects will have multiple learning objectives spread over some or all of the six levels. Lower numbered subjects in the curriculum will probably emphasize lower members of the hierarchy while higher numbered subjects will load more heavily on the higher levels of the hierarchy, as students build up enough information to be able to perform more complex analytic, evaluative, and synthetic tasks. However, it is possible for even introductory subjects to aspire to promote some degree of all six levels of learning outcomes under the right conditions.

Based on the level of knowledge toward which a particular learning outcome statement is aimed, the instructor will next need to align the subject teaching methods in such a way as to promote the aim actually being proposed. Not only can we not assume that methods aimed at fostering the lower level learning outcomes (typically lectures and "objective" examinations) will produce the higher level outcomes as some sort of spontaneous, magical consequence, we must also recognize that an over reliance on lower level teaching methods (and their corresponding means of evaluation) are actually likely to undermine progress toward achieving the higher levels of learning outcomes. Indeed, they are probably counterproductive. Students see what we covertly value by the way we actually teach and not by what we *say* we value. If we rely mostly on lectures to distribute "re-memorable" information, and we assess student performance primarily using the most common types of easily gradable memory-oriented testing techniques, students will quickly pick up what is really going on and reduce their mental activity to the level we are teaching to and rewarding with our evaluative methods.

Rather than presuming that students will automatically be able to accomplish the higher level outcomes because they have the foundations provided by the lower levels, we will need to

align our teaching methods to the higher forms of learning outcomes we list on our syllabus. Failing that, we should probably simply give up and not list such higher level objectives at all. In any case, we should not be fooled into listing a hierarchy of education objectives because we feel bullied into compliance and then fail to align our teaching methods with our statements.

Aligning Assessment Methods with One's Outcome Statements Using the Bloom Taxonomy

Perhaps the point is now sufficiently made and merely needs to be mentioned in closing this discussion of the hierarchy of learning objectives: our approaches to assessment of student learning should be congruent with the learning objectives we espouse and the teaching methods we employ. Figure 5 is designed to reinforce the close relationship that exists between the way we formulate our learning objectives and the way we might profitably think about our assessment methods.
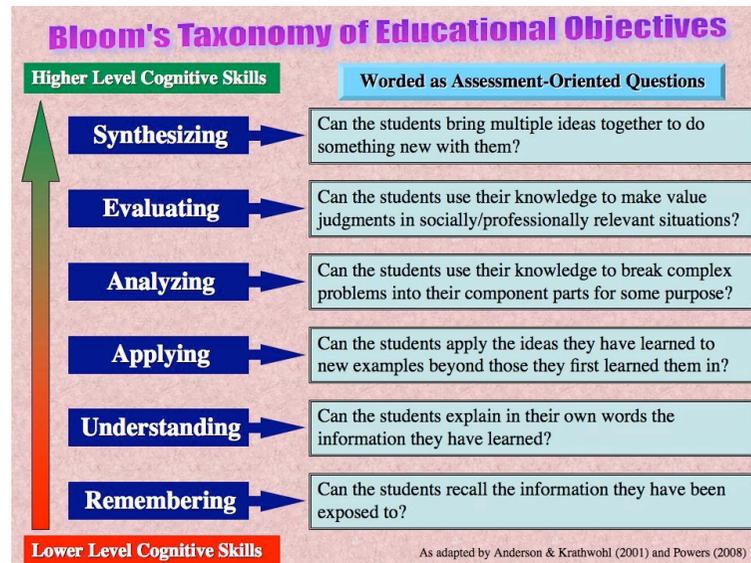

Figure 5. Bloom-Style Taxonomy Adapted to Focus on the Assessment Orientation of the Hierarchy

To illustrate the reciprocal closeness, each level in the objective s statements displayed in Figure 4 has been minimally reworded as an abstract assessment question in Figure 5. For example, the objective statement concerned with the remembering level was worded as "students will recall" and the assessment question asks "can students recall . . . ?" thereby focusing on what should be assessed. As individual instructors fill in the abstract shell provided in the sample outcomes statements with content related to the subjects they teach, they also produce their own template of questions to address in formulating their assessment objectives. Alignment should be the result of this process.

Aligning Subject Level Objectives with Higher Level Institutional Learning Objectives

As with any complex organization, HKBU is arranged in a hierarchy of institutional units, each charged with responsibility for achieving some portion of the organization's overall institutional mission. In the case of the University's teaching mission, the highest level unit is the faculty Senate, which ultimately has responsibility for establishing the overall educational policy for the University, especially through its various subcommittees, such as Complementary Studies, and the like. As shown in Figure 6, it is at this level that such things as the University's general learning objectives, policy on Whole Person Education (WPE), and the profile on Desired Graduate Attributes are worked out and promulgated. As we move toward full implementation of the OBTL philosophy, these highest level objectives and goals will need to be reformulated so as to provide a master frame within which the rest of the cascading pyramid of specificity can be developed.
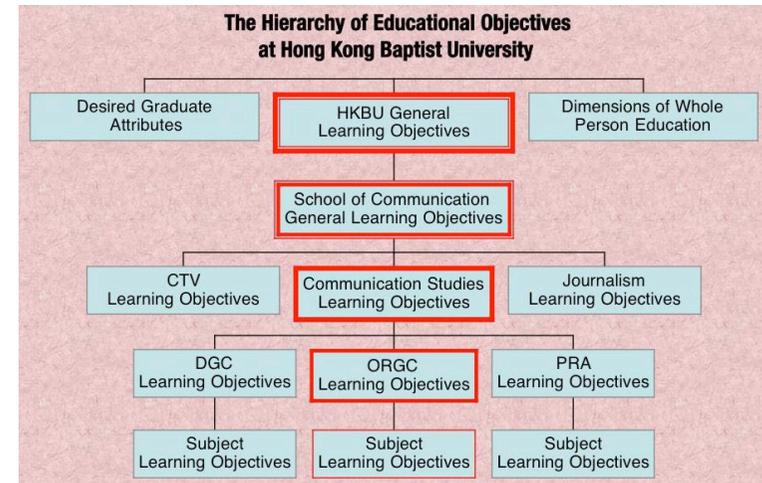

Figure 6. The Hierarchy of Educational Objectives into which Subject Syllabi Fit

The next level of specificity probably falls to the Faculties and Schools that make up the second level of educational structure. Thus, each such unit, including the School of Communication, will need to review its statements concerning its educational objectives to give them an OBTL formulation, especially with OBTL's emphasis on accountability concerning what students should be able to *do* after their programs of study. This cascading specificity continues downward in ever greater detail through the various Departments, Options and, ultimately, to the individual subjects that have been the primary focus of the OBTL exercise. The appendix to this document illustrates the cascading specificity that might be achieved between the Communication Studies Department's OBTL Objectives and each of its three Options. The material in the Appendix does not represent an official reflection of the Department's learning objectives, but merely my personal attempt to reflect how the principle of cascading specificity might be accomplished in line with the OBTL philosophy. In the meantime, the next section of this document summarizes how individual syllabi might be reformulated using OBTL principles.

CONVERTING CURRENT SYLLABI TO THE OBTL APPROACH

Based on the theoretical background presented above, this section considers the practicalities of converting specific syllabi into an OBTL format. The basic steps for transforming an otherwise fully developed syllabus may be outlined as follows:

1. Prepare the Outcome-Based Learning Objectives
   a. Identify 5 to 6 specific Learning Objectives you have for your course.
   b. Word them so that they emphasize what students will be able to *do* as a result.
   c. Arrange them so that they reflect a progression in the level of cognitive skills required.
2. Select the kinds of teaching methods you will be using to conduct your class.
3. Determine the kinds of assessment methods (including, especially, performance criteria) you will be using to evaluate student progress in achieving the learning outcomes.
4. Explain the manner in which the assessment methods will be used to produce a final grade, including the percentages that each assessed piece of work will count toward determining the final grade.

The rest of this section elaborates these four points just a bit.

Preparing Outcome Based Learning Objectives

The first phase of the process of transforming a more traditional syllabus into an OBTL-style format is, of course, preparing the learning objectives for the course. This might involve three steps, as outlined above.

Identify 5 to 6 specific Learning Objectives. The key to the entire OBTL enterprise is the formulation of learning outcomes that indicate what students will be able to do as a result of taking the class. However, there is general agreement that these should be kept to a manageable number of broad outcomes that provide a constructive framework for subject planning and should not become a compendium of every possible goal one might have.

For clarity, these learning outcomes might be listed in some sort of bullet point form rather than in paragraph form so that they are easy to keep track of during the transformation process. Students might also find this form useful in the version that is prepared for their use. At least, *I* find such lists helpful.

Word the Outcomes so as to Emphasize Doing. As mentioned earlier, OBTL learning outcomes should be formulated so that they emphasize what students will be able to do as a result of learning the course material. This differs in emphasis from the more traditional way of writing education goals, which are teacher- or content-centered because they emphasize what the teacher will do in conducting the class. Below is a list of teacher-centered objectives I prepared for a large course called Introduction to Communication that I regularly teach.

Teacher-Centered Goal Statements

The **PURPOSE OF THIS COURSE** is to:

- Introduce the technical vocabulary that communication professionals use to talk about the types of communication phenomena they study.
- Survey the explanatory principles that communication professionals have developed to understand various kinds of communication phenomena, especially the kinds of message activity involved
- Illustrate how communication concepts and principles may be used to critically evaluate the routine communication phenomena that communication professionals are involved with everyday
- Promote creative, theory-based problem-solving that applies the essential communication concepts and principles to making effective choices when producing personal and professional messages

Below I have tried to convert these statements to an OBTL format.

Outcome-Centered Goal Statements

After completing this course **STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO**:

- Define the technical vocabulary that communication professionals use to talk about the types of communication phenomena they study.
- Explain the major theoretical principles that communication professionals have developed to understand various kinds of communication phenomena, especially the kinds of message activity involved
- Use the communication concepts and principles to critically evaluate the routine communication phenomena that communication professionals are involved with everyday
- Apply the essential communication concepts and principles to the problem of making effective choices when producing personal and professional messages

Arrange the Outcomes Following the Hierarchical Progression. Or don't. Although I am still in the middle of thinking about how to transform my syllabi to OBTL format, I believe it will be useful to arrange my outcomes statements in hierarchical order since I can more easily see what I will be trying to accomplish by viewing it as a hierarchical sequence, and it also helps me determine if I have left any gaps in what I think the class should be accomplishing. For example, my list above suggests that I will not be trying to do much synthesis (I'm content with this absence, because I'm teaching 200 first-year students). I can only make this judgment because my list shows me the absence of this highest level statement. Other than that, I suppose, there is no reason for arranging the outcome statements in this way.

Selecting Outcome Based Learning Activities

Throughout previous sections I have been mentioning representative teaching methods that might work for fostering learning outcomes at various levels of educational objectives. The key here is that if I really list a particular outcome as one I aim to foster, I need to be able to point to the content and activities that are aimed at promoting that outcome. I cannot just hope the goal will be achieved through luck or as the fallout of activities that promote other

kinds of learning. If my goal emphasized "students will be able to use teamwork skills to accomplish a group task," but I do not have any team-building activities I probably am not really emphasizing that outcome.

Determining Outcome Based Assessment Procedures

The system comes to full fruition when the assessment procedures are added to the mix. The issue here is making sure that the assessment procedures are aimed at determining the degree to which the student has achieved one or another of the outcomes listed. Thus, for example, if one of my outcomes says that "students will be able to explain the five key principles of communication *pragmatics*," then my tests (assuming that a test is my assessment method) should be aimed toward giving them an opportunity to explain, not just recognize or recall the concept when it is presented. In this way, what we say in our outcome statements exerts a guiding force on how we design the rest of our class; i.e., it has implications for our own actions.

Converting Assessments into Grades

Moving from assessment to producing grades is not any harder in OBTL than in the traditional format; in fact, it may be easier in some ways. First, each assessable piece of work is assigned a percentage which identifies how much it contributes to determining the final grade, just like the old system. Thus, a term paper that counted 20% before might still count 20% here. And the term papers of all of the students will still likely fall along a range of success in achieving the learning outcomes specified, from quite successful to only marginally so. Thus, one can still determine the relative merits of the work one evaluates. However, what seem to me to be quite different OBTL is the amount of effort that goes into the expressing and explaining the criteria one will be using in evaluating student assignments. Having specified, for example, that the paper is designed to foster the learning outcome "students will be able to synthesize together the theories they have been learning in order to produce an original, theory-motivated proposal for a public relations client," and having assigned the long form term paper as the teaching activity as the tool for implementing that outcome, then, when assessing the student's progress toward that goal, one had best be able to identify the criteria for determining the degree to which a proposal is "synthesizing," "theory-motivated," and "original." Thus, even the more general term "synthesis" would need to be considered when developing the criteria used to judge the work since it is listed as an evaluative standard in the learning outcome statement.

This concludes my draft of this introduction to the OBTL syllabus-transformation process. Please feel free to share comments and, especially suggestions, for how to make it more clear or useful during the OBTL transformation process.

[On to the Appendix]

Appendix 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE APPENDIX

There is logic of "cascading specificity" inherent in the OBTL approach, one that begins with reformulating the desired learning outcomes of the entire University (which ultimately provides the basis for a reasoned set of graduate attributes, and what we mean by Whole Person Education), becomes more specific at the School and Faculty level, and even more specific and detailed for actual programs (such as, say, Chinese Journalism or Organizational Communication). It is at that point that individual courses and their syllabi rise up to meet the descending cascade of outcome statements. On a lark, I tried to do this for the mid-level of specificity to see if it can be done. This appendix is a result of that effort. In it, I wrote learning objectives for my department and then tried to give them more specificity by adapting them to the details of each of the three separate Options that the Department administers: Digital Graphic Communication, Organizational Communication, and Public Relations and Advertising. I don't claim these as final or complete, but they should provide some hint concerning how the logic of the OBTL system might operate. To the extent that these suggestions are valuable, they could be abstracted to higher and higher levels (for us, most specifically, of course, the School), and specified more concretely in specific syllabi. Again, if they can be improved, please feel free to make suggestions.

Communication Studies Department:
Proposed OBTL Objectives

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The general **TEACHING–LEARNING OBJECTIVES** for the Communication Studies Department at Hong Kong Baptist University might be constructed as follows:

Students of the Communication Studies Department should be able to:

1. Explain the key concepts, principles, and theories in their specialty areas of the communication discipline, including their history and controversial aspects where appropriate.
2. Use appropriate theoretical concepts to identify and analyze the communication problems typically faced in their professional specialty.
3. Plan and conduct quantitative, qualitative, case study, survey, and rhetorical research appropriate to their area of professional specialization.
4. Employ appropriate theoretical principles as the basis for proposing practical solutions for the types to communication problems typically encountered in the professional settings they will participate in.
5. Develop concrete action plans for systematically implementing their theory-based proposals in the kinds of practical professional contexts they will face.
6. Identify appropriate criteria (standards) and methods for evaluating the effectiveness of their communication action plans during their actual implementation.

Within these general Departmental Teaching and Learning Objectives, each Option might develop its own specific Teaching and Learning Objectives which specify how the general objectives apply to their area of specialization. For example, the following learning outcomes might be considered as overall frames within which individual subjects in the various curricula could be developed.

Students of the Digital Graphic Communication (DGC) Option should be able to:

1. Explain the key concepts, principles, and theories related to visual design, semiotics, aesthetics, and persuasion and how they relate to the visual communication process in such settings as advertising, communication on the Internet, illustration for print publication, and animation.
2. Use appropriate theoretical concepts to identify and analyze the communication problems typically faced by graphic designers in their work on design teams in various professional settings.
3. Plan and conduct quantitative, qualitative, case study, semiotic, survey, and rhetorical research appropriate to their work in various graphic design areas.
4. Employ appropriate theoretical principles as the basis for proposing practical solutions for the types to communication problems typically encountered when addressing issues in the graphic design field.
5. Develop concrete action plans for systematically implementing their theory-based design proposals in the kinds of practical professional contexts they will face.
6. Identify appropriate criteria (standards) and methods for evaluating the effectiveness of their graphic design products during their actual implementation phase.

Students of the Organizational Communication (ORGC) Option should be able to:

1. Explain the key concepts, principles, and theories related to the analysis of communication problems typically experienced in corporate, governmental, and non-governmental organizations.
2. Use appropriate theoretical concepts to identify and analyze the communication problems typically faced in corporate, governmental, and non-governmental organizational contexts.
3. Plan and conduct quantitative, qualitative, case study, survey, and rhetorical research appropriate to investigating corporate, governmental, and non-governmental organizational communication situations.
4. Employ appropriate theoretical principles as the basis for proposing practical solutions for the types to communication problems typically encountered in Hong Kong, Mainland, and international settings.
5. Develop concrete action plans for systematically implementing their theory-based proposals in the kinds of practical professional contexts organizational communication specialists will typically face.
6. Identify appropriate criteria (standards) and methods for evaluating the effectiveness of their communication action plans during their actual implementation phase.

Students of the Public and Relations and Advertising (PRA) Option should be able to:

1. Explain the key concepts, principles, and theories related to such things as public relations and advertising campaigns, audience psychology, and the social and cultural aspects of both Chinese and international PRA contexts.
2. Use appropriate theoretical concepts to analyze the communication problems typically faced when planning and executing public relations and advertising campaigns for products and services, as well as during crisis communication situations.
3. Plan and conduct quantitative, qualitative, case study, survey, and rhetorical research appropriate to the public relations and advertising industries.
4. Employ appropriate theoretical principles as the basis for proposing practical solutions for the types to communication problems typically encountered in the professional settings they will participate in.
5. Develop concrete action plans for systematically implementing their theory-based proposals in the kinds of practical public relations and advertising situations they will typically face.
6. Identify appropriate criteria (standards) and methods for evaluating the effectiveness of their public relations and advertising action plans during their actual implementation phase.

[End of the Appendix]